

Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Clinical & Population Health Research Program

Announces the PhD Thesis Defense of

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The social epidemiology of gender and eating disorders: Theoretical and methodological considerations

Tuesday, March 29, 2022 at 12 p.m. via Zoom Meeting

Gendered inequities in eating disorders (EDs) are well-established; however, epidemiologic research on EDs often treats these inequities as universal, fixed, or even self-evident. As such, there are important knowledge gaps regarding the social patterning and structural drivers of EDs that may be undermining equitable resource allocation and intervention development. Drawing on intersectionality and other feminist theories, this dissertation sought to address these gaps in three aims: (1) describe the prevalence of EDs and associated symptomology at the intersection of gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, and weight status; (2) estimate the effect of structural sexism on ED risk; and (3) evaluate whether the effect of structural sexism on ED risk differs by intersectional subgroup. Participants came from the Growing Up Today Study, a U.S. national cohort of ~27,000 young people. In Aim 1, an intersectional Multilevel Analysis of Individual Heterogeneity and Discriminatory Accuracy revealed a complex social patterning of ED prevalence characterized by meaningful within-gender-group heterogeneity. Aim 2 used sequential conditional mean models to show that living in a structurally sexist state (i.e., a state with high levels of social, political, and economic gender inequality) significantly increased ED risk over time; Aim 3 built on these findings by showing how multiply marginalized individuals (e.g., gender nonconforming sexual minorities) experienced disproportionate risk increases when exposed to structural sexism. Findings from this dissertation challenge prevailing views on gendered ED inequities by demonstrating their intersectional and contextual nature. This work also contributes theoretical and methodological advancements for epidemiologic research on intersectional health inequities more broadly.

Mentor

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